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ABSTRACT

Various issues affecting minorities and their education are addressed in the transcripts of this broadcast program. The first speaker focuses on the problems involved in court ordered desegregation, which often includes busing. Among the causes for some of the racial tension surrounding desegregation are the increased enrollment of minorities in public schools and social class variables. Another issue discussed is the social relations that teachers and students engage in. Here, interactions are referred to as "games," the regularly recurring patterns of relationships in classrooms. The impact of disruptive students in school is the next topic discussed. The next speaker notes that minority students are often caught in a downward spiral of futility, which begins with an awareness of rejection. In order for this spiral to be reversed, high school personnel need to be aware of the roots of the problem, as well as to know something about cultural differences. The next speaker comments on the American class system, noting that is is social class, not just racism, that is a major factor in the failure of desegregation. The last two speakers are high school students in Buffalo, New York, who discuss how integration works in their schools. (Author/AM)

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INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

TRANSCRIPT FOR PROGRAM SCHEDULED FOR BROADCAST
FOR THE WEEK OF JUNE 7, 1976
Program #32

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Options in Education

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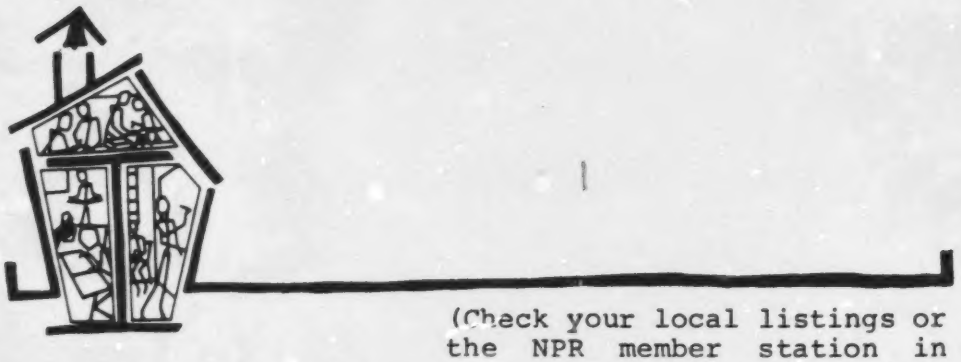

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BLAIR: I'm Wendy Blair with NPR's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a news magazine about all the issues in education -- from the ABC's of preschool to the alphabet soup of government programs. If you've ever been to school, we have something that will interest you.

TEACHER: What I'm talking about is real changes in the school system to begin with, and part of that needs to be integration - because we need to have different kinds of children together in classrooms.

As a teacher, I need that. I cannot teach children about each other. They learn from each other, and I think it is a responsibility of teachers to decide exactly what kinds of things we need in the classroom, and, then, to fight very strongly for them.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. The teacher you just heard is from Buffalo, New York - one of a number of American cities currently under court order to desegregate. Desegregation - or, more precisely, how schools, teachers and students are reacting to it, is the subject of this edition of OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

(MUSIC - "THE FAMILY OF MAN")

ROBERT COLES: The racism in South Boston is obvious - and it is racism. It's not only class and neighborhood.

GOLDMAN: That was Robert Coles, Pulitzer Prize winning author and teacher, reiterating a little bit about the bad news. I'm Connie Goldman sitting in for Wendy Blair who's on assignment.

Court ordered desegregation, which often includes busing, dominates the education news these days. We hear about explosive situations in Boston, Louisville, or Wilmington, Delaware, for example. The reason for the problem is racism. Right? Well, yes, but not completely. Social class is a factor, and the problems may get more, not less, complex. Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, Director of the National Institute of Education, tells John some of the reasons.

DR. HAROLD HODGKINSON

HODGKINSON: If you look at the birth rate decline in this country over the last decade, it's primarily in the Caucasian and middle-class sectors of society. If you look at minority births over the last 12 years, they've held up very constant. That means that right now a larger percentage comes from minority group backgrounds, and also comes from lower SES backgrounds.

MERROW: SES? Being socio-economic status?

HODGKINSON: Right. We don't know how long this will continue, and it's likely that when birth control information gets distributed more evenly throughout the society that this trend may reverse. But, at the moment, you have a phenomenon called "differential fertility" - which means that more children are being produced by ethnic minorities and by lower SES groups - and this is changing the constituency of the population. That has an impact not only on elementary schools, but eventually throughout the society.

MERROW: Well, that means, then, that public schools in this country are getting "Blacker" and "Browner" as it were.

HODGKINSON: Yeah. And it's going to happen in colleges and universities and eventually the adult population as well. The reason it's important, in my opinion, is that we've tended to avoid this problem, or hope that it will go away. And it seems to me that we've really got to take seriously the educational needs of groups that have not done well in the schools and try to provide some significant new ways of helping them achieve.

MERROW: Are more kids having an integrated experience in public schools these days?

HODGKINSON: That's a fascinating question - because for years we've had a thing called "tracking" in the public schools. And you can have a white suburban high school, in which the kids who come from the lowest economic background go into commercial and trade courses in the high school, and the wealthier kids end up in the college prep programs. So, even in an all-white high school, you can have a lot of segregation going on by social class. And, in my opinion, social class is a far more important factor than race these days in determining who goes where.

There is a sizable Black middle class in this country who are doing very well, and you can't lump them with other people of the Black race who are not doing well. It's far better to consider them as members of the middle class.

One interesting phenomenon that we've been looking at lately is "white flight," which is the tendency of middle class whites to flee to the suburbs where they can get a better education for their children. That phenomenon now is being followed by "Black flight," and I suspect that's going to happen increasingly as you get a larger and larger Black middle class.

MERROW: That's got to create real problems for the city schools, though, which are, apparently, being left as a kind of "dumping ground" for the poor?

HODGKINSON: Right. Not only the poor, but those whose achievement levels are lower, whose ambition and energy levels are lower - because we know that's related to family background, and that's related to social class. So, even more important than having all-Black schools, you have this "brain drain" of the brightest kids who go with their parents to the suburbs, and I think that's even more important.

Also, when we think about minority students, we often think about a compensatory principle - that is, the minority kid is like a damaged car, and the school is like a mechanic, and tries to make the kid or the "car" better again. Nobody looks for the talents that those kids have that might not be visible on the normal kinds of intelligence tests.

I'll give you a couple of examples. A lot of the Black kids who I've known and worked with are just tremendous talkers. Nobody takes advantage of that in schools and tries to maximize their ability to communicate quickly and effectively in dealing with the problems that they have to face everyday. So, there may be a whole lot of advantages to working with ethnic minorities and lower SES kids in looking for the talents that they already have in order to survive in their environments, and then using those as the chief motivators to get them to do better in school.

MERROW: How much time do the public schools have to get ready for this new type of student body - that is, a student body which is much "Blacker" and "Browner" than the public schools are used to?

HODGKINSON: None at all. That population is here today. It's entering elementary school . . . Well, actually, right now in '76, you're finding a rapid shift in that kind of student body in the early years of elementary school. So, in a relatively small number of years, that will be a phenomenon throughout the country, too.

I think it's important because it will force educators to take a very important problem seriously. I'm optimistic about the long-term outcome of it.

MERROW: Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, Director of the National Institute of Education.

GOLDMAN: Hodgkinson is optimistic despite his judgment that the schools aren't ready for the changes that are upon us.

MERROW: Public schools may be re-segregating right now. Sixty percent of all Black children go to schools which are at least 80% Black. City schools across the nation are becoming "Blacker" and "Browner." For example, Chicago's public schools were just under 55% Black in 1970. Today, 60% of the students in Chicago are Black. But, as Hodgkinson said, the minority middle-class families are moving to the suburbs. That leaves the city schools without a substantial middle-class enrollment - as in Boston, for example.

GOLDMAN: Most of us know about South Boston, but in another Massachusetts city, Springfield, desegregation seems to be working. Nearly all of Springfield's 42 public schools are racially balanced - with a minority enrollment of about 25% - according to University of Massachusetts Professor Alfred Alschuler. He directs the Social Literacy Project in the Springfield schools. It's social literacy, he says, that makes desegregation work. He explains this experiment to John.

ALFRED ALSCHULER

ALSCHULER: Mostly we think about literacy as learning to read and write. But, actually, literacy is much more basic than that. It's the ability to name various kinds of reality, to understand reality using those names, and to do something about it.

MERROW: Like what, for example?

ALSCHULER: Well, for example, chemical literacy would be the ability to name the chemical aspects of our world. . .

MERROW: So, therefore, I'm chemically illiterate.

ALSCHULER: Yes. The same way you could be physically illiterate, or physiologically illiterate.

Social literacy is the process of naming our social relations in using some common vocabulary -- understanding the causes of our conflicts and our harmony . . .

MERROW: Give me some examples there.

ALSCHULER: For instance, in schools there's a tremendous amount of conflict, as you might imagine, between students, between students and teachers, among teachers, between teachers and administrators, and so

forth. And what we decided to do was really the obvious - namely, to see if we couldn't develop a common vocabulary for describing the ways in which we are relating - so that we could empower people to do something about those conflicts.

MERROW: Okay. Tell me about some of the vocabulary, then, that describes the social relations in schools.

ALSCHULER: Well, what we found probably as the most effective vocabulary key was a "game" language. There are regularly recurring patterns of relationships in classrooms that can be described as a "game." For instance, the milling game. That game is played at the beginning of nearly every class when students come in. The object of the game from their point of view is to delay the opening of class, and some of the rules that they follow are that they never mill alone. (That tends to be somewhat dangerous.) You only move as slow as you possibly can when the teacher tells you to do something. And you also try to push the teacher to the brink of anger, but not push her over that, of course.

MERROW: How do you do that? What are the strategies of the milling game?

ALSCHULER: Well, for instance, you pretend not to hear. Or you pretend to ask a question that sounds like you're really interested in the subject matter, but, in fact, what you're really trying to do is to delay the lesson.

MERROW: Okay. Those are the rules for students. There must be rules for teachers.

ALSCHULER: Sure. One of the rules is that you have to get the class started as quickly as possible, but you have to do that without losing your cool. If you lose your cool in front of the class, you, obviously lose points, as it were, in terms of the respect that you have in front of the kids. Obviously, you want to respond to the questions that the kids are asking, but at the same time you want to get them to their seat.

MERROW: Okay. You're saying that somehow things get better if both students and teachers understand that there is this game going on, and understand the rules?

ALSCHULER: Certainly it can get better. For example, if a teacher is having a hard day, and perhaps it's fifth period, and the kids come in and they start milling -- very quickly one child gets singled out as the object of the teacher's frustrations, and that child might get thrown out of class. Well, that may solve that particular problem, that particular period. But, as sure as anything, the next day, and perhaps every class, there will be the milling game played over and over again. All that's happened at that point is that a child has been victimized. But the game continues to go on. Really, the teacher is victimized also. What we're saying is that -- rather than pick on teachers or pick on kids, or pick on administrators, the important thing to do is to identify these games; to name them in terms of a common language and then figure out what the legitimate needs are of everyone that are getting expressed in these games - so that alternative, mutually satisfying ways of meeting those needs can be found.

For instance, one of our teachers essentially stopped the whole procedure of milling by calling it exactly that. He said, "Hey, you kids are playing the milling game, and I want it to stop." And that, in fact, did stop the game. What it didn't do, however, was to figure out a better way of solving the kids' needs for moving around, for making contact with their friends, for getting attention from the teacher, and the teacher's need to be respected and so forth.

MERROW: So, you're saying that the milling game actually is serving some kind of real need?

ALSCHULER: Of course.

MERROW: Okay. Then it wasn't enough for the teacher to say - "Hey, look! I know what's going on. This is the milling game, and I don't want to play it." You're saying that they have to meet those needs in some way. The question is - "How"?

ALSCHULER: Right. The first part of any kind of literacy is simply naming what's happening. And that's what's accomplished by talking about it in terms of a game.

The second part is the analysis of the underlying causes. This begins to move you toward a more satisfying solution. Typically, we teach people in social literacy courses to negotiate solutions, something which is too rarely done in schools.

MERROW: Well, is that where MALT comes in? This fascinating idea of MALT. Come on, you explain it.

ALSCHULER: I'd better explain what MALT is. It's not something to drink. It stands for -- Mutually Agreed-upon Learning Time. Basically, it's a way of observing how much of the class period is spent by the students attending to the subject matter. What we discovered, at least in the urban, desegregated schools where we were working, was that typically less than half the class period was spent in attending to the subject matter. Over half the time the teacher was trying to teach and the students were not focusing on what the teacher was trying to instruct them about. When you have approximately fifty percent or more of the class period that's not being spent on instructional material, you've got an enormous amount of conflict. Just compare that, for instance, to an industry where you have fifty percent down time -- more teachers who came to school only fifty percent of the time. I mean, you'd think that was a rebellion. In fact, it is a kind of quiet rebellion that's going on in the classroom. You get kids who look like they're paying attention, but really they're in a kind of state of semi-comatose withdrawal. They just look like they're paying attention.

Well, the idea is to focus on this wasted time that is productive, neither from the teacher's, nor the students', point of view, to name it, to figure out what kinds of activities would be mutually satisfying for both and to incorporate more of that into the class.

MERROW: But, the typical notion in school, I think, is to identify the wrongdoer; that is to say, it's the kid who is not paying attention. Therefore, it's the kid's fault, therefore, kick the kid out of class. And from the kid's point of view, the teacher is being irrational or being unfair. You seem to be saying that there are things that are systematic, things within the system that need to be changed, and it's not productive to blame either the teacher or the kid.

ALSCHULER: Absolutely. I'd like to tell you a couple of stories about "killer kids" and "killer teachers." If you talked to an assistant principal in most difficult schools and, perhaps, teachers too, they will say that there are maybe five or ten percent of the kids who are particularly troublesome, and if some way could be found to handle both kids, then everything would be better. And they are referred to often as "killer kids."

A friend of ours in Philadelphia attempted to find out whether or not there were such things as "killer kids," and he got teacher nominations and found them, and so forth. In fact, virtually all of the students were in systematic difficulties. They were interested in school; they were not particularly troublesome in the sense that they had deep underlying pathology. They were solvable problems; they weren't physiological.

You know, if you say that there are "killer kids," then presumably you can say that there are "killer teachers." And in many schools -- for example, one where I was recently -- there are seventy-some odd teachers. Six of those seventy teachers were referring over fifty percent of the referrals to the front office. And one could say that they're "killer teachers." But, even there, if you look more deeply, that's a symptom of where there's a problematic classroom, not that there's a problematic teacher.

For instance, one teacher who was the worst "killer teacher" in school had her referral rate dropped to zero almost overnight. The only thing that happened was that the principal had asked her to form a team with three other teachers to do team teaching in a quad of about a hundred kids. She had been teaching in a classroom alone with seats that had been bolted down, so that the only way that she could teach was to stand up in front and lecture, which, obviously, was not her best way of teaching -- the kids got bored and she got angry, and she threw them out. She was victimized by the situation. The kids were victimized by the situation, and by naming that situational problem, we are able to transform it in a way to help everyone. And, really, this is what we're interested in, making sure that no individual is victimized unnecessarily.

It simply is unreasonable to assume that in every human conflict, one party, one side in that conflict, is to blame. I simply know of no schools where even one percent of the teachers in these conflict situations are referred to the front office, expelled, detained, and so forth. It's always the students. And it's just not reasonable that they're always to blame.

MERROW: You talked about that isolated teacher, and it seems to me that in the things I've been reading of yours, teacher isolation is one of the problems, and you also go on to talk about some of the unwritten rules of school, like the unwritten rule that teachers during their free period never talk about educational problems, but instead, play cards or smoke cigarettes, or what have you. Are there a lot of other unwritten rules that have become part of the problem?

ALSCHULER: In a sense, the underlying problem is the social illiteracy of teachers. I don't mean to be blaming them for it. The structure of many schools makes it almost impossible for teachers to identify their common problems. They have very little planning time. They spend a vast majority of their day alone in class with kids, a unique situation. Most of us adults spend time with other adults during the day. During their free time, they're tired. They like to let off steam, just like the students. And often there is a norm, that in the teachers' lounge during the lunch period, you don't talk about serious educational issues.

Other forms in which they could identify problems, such as the teachers' meetings, often are not meetings at all. They're announcement periods. As a result, there's very little chance for teachers to get together to name these kinds of problems.

But there are also internal factors. Teachers are reluctant to tell other teachers that they are having a problem. That's an admission that perhaps they're not a good teacher. So, there is altogether a kind of organizational conspiracy, if you will, to keep teachers isolated - to keep teachers thinking that whatever problems they have are their own unique problems.

Here's another example - a particularly powerful one. In one school, whenever a student came late to class, the teacher had to negotiate with the student to see whether that lateness was the result of a legitimate excuse or an illegitimate one. Each teacher had to confront the problem in isolation of other teachers. Often students were extremely good at conning teachers. But no matter whether they conned effectively or not, it always took class time away and was a stressful situation for both the teacher and the students.

Simply by looking at some of the records, we discovered that in one semester alone in this junior high school, there were 127 referrals to the front office from these door-way conflicts that had broken down into angry debates. None of the individual teachers were aware of that. We were able to reduce the number of referrals to the front office by over eighty percent without changing the kids or changing the teachers, but simply by changing the rule of the system, namely, that every student who was late went immediately to the front office, got a free pass up to three times. And that took care of about eighty percent of these incidents, increased the amount of time teachers had in their class free of these debates, and so forth. There was a system-oriented solution that was simply not visible, because teachers really never got together to talk about the fact that they, and every other teacher, had a similar problem.

MERROW: And after three times, what happened?

ALSCHULER: After three times, then they went to the front office, and they had a very serious discussion with the principal.

MERROW: So, in effect, you were allowed to be late for class three times in a year.

ALSCHULER: That's right.

MERROW: There's such a pervasive optimism that comes through the things you're saying. Can we conclude that somehow most school problems will go away if we simply adopt the system of social illiteracy training?

ALSCHULER: I am optimistic about a number of things. We're finding that teachers are willing to spend time on this project, voluntarily, after school. Now, that's a rather unusual thing. Typically, they leave school as if they were shot from a cannon. They need to get away to return to a different kind of relationship with people, and so forth. But they're staying after school to work on these kinds of things anywhere from two to five hours, because they're getting something from it, without pay. We have the support in Springfield of the Springfield Federation of Teachers, the Parents for Quality Integrated Education, as well as the central administration; and we're seeing that this is something that is making a difference for teachers in a way that counts. It is a success story. The buses are running, and people are cooperating.

Now, obviously, there are some problems that occur. For example, the suspension rates have gone up dramatically in the last seven years.

MERROW: Who's being suspended most often -- Blacks, whites?

ALSCHULER: Blacks are being suspended at a disproportionate rate. And I think this simply reflects the fact that the kind of education going on in the schools has not fully adjusted to the new racial mix.

MERROW: Professor, how about the whole question of "white flight" -- are whites leaving the Springfield schools as fast as they can?

ALSCHULER: No, this has not occurred to the degree that it has elsewhere. There was a statistical drop in the number of white students in the school system. But that appeared to be mostly the result of the differential birth rates. And this situation has stabilized over the last couple of years, so it is a pretty stable situation at this point.

MERROW: But, lest anybody think that it's an overnight type of thing, it's probably worth pointing out that you've been working there for five years.

ALSCHULER: That's right. And, as a matter of fact, in my younger days I was a flaming liberal. Then, I thought perhaps I was just a progressive. Then, I thought, no, really I'd like to conserve what's best in schools. Now, I don't even think I'm a regressive. I think that I'm someone who wants to go back about 200 years to some of the principles that are in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution.

Really, what we're up to is to increase the amount of democratic participation in decision making. We are so thoroughly democratic in our orientation that we want to see this happen in classrooms, among teachers, between teachers and administrators, and so forth. And so long as we adhere to these basic democratic ideals, I suspect we'll survive in Springfield.

MERROW: Although, I think it's a pretty radical notion to think of schools as being democratic. Thanks very much.

(MUSIC -- "The Games People Play")

MERROW: Earlier, Dr. Harold Hodgkinson said that minority students are increasing in numbers and percentages in the public schools -- 20 percent in 1970 and nearly 25 percent today. And Professor Alschuler suggests that many teachers are social illiterates, that they won't be able to cope with the differences in social class and culture.

GOLDMAN: Are schools capable of changing to meet changing conditions? Recently, the U.S. Office of Education sponsored a conference in Denver, Colorado on reforming the secondary school system.

MERROW: Do you think the American people understand what one destructive kid can do to a classroom?

PRINCIPAL: No, I don't.

GOLDMAN: That was Bill Hall, a junior high school principal in New Smyrna Beach, Florida, who talked to John at the Denver conference about the impact of disruptive students in his schools.

BILL HALL

HALL: I'm talking about your violent-prone student, your disruptive student who may not be violent, but he disrupts your class day after day after day. I'm also talking about the student who just wants to get out.

MERROW: How big a problem is that?

HALL: Let me tell you of my own school. We have 825 students. And I would say that at least ten percent of those students are discipline problems. As far as truancy problems and those who don't want to go to school, I have at least thirty; and I spend all of my time with those students. That means that there are 700 other students who are not getting the attention from me that they deserve.

MERROW: The norm is that Black students are suspended more often than white students -- Black students get in trouble more than white students, and one explanation that's put forth is the fact that schools are inflexible, that schools are run by whites who are basically inflexible and do not know how to deal with this whole desegregation question and that, therefore, it's the schools that need to change, not changing the rules so you can get rid of kids.

HALL: I would accept that statement in part. However, I would have to say that, due to the culture of the Blacks, there is a lot of misunderstanding between middle-class whites and the Black culture. They are louder -- they are more apt to fight. I would say that just perhaps the schools have not adjusted to the change. We have just done a poor job in adjusting. We did not prepare ourselves adequately -- we knew it was coming, but we just waited and waited. And when it came upon us, in essence, we were not ready.

MERROW: Bill, what will happen to these 13, 14, 15-year-old disruptive and truant kids, white or Black, when the school system washes its hands of them? What alternatives are open then?

HALL: I think that just to let the student go is wrong. I don't propose that the schools lose their responsibility. If the student is taken out of school or leaves school on his own at that age, certainly at any time he does have the right to re-enter. And I think the schools should reinforce that right and should recruit that student, once he does leave.

The way it is now, it becomes more difficult. Perhaps an outside agency, such as a family service center, could take over counseling. I like the idea that has been proposed in one of our workshops here that the federal government set up a youth conservation corps, something of this nature. There are programs available for these students, if we just look hard enough.

MERROW: I sense that you're not comfortable putting forth this position that, basically, ten percent of your kids really aren't school material, and you're not comfortable as a school man saying that schools aren't working for these ten percent.

HALL: I would say that it's an embarrassment -- we are failing. And, yes, it's desperate, but we have failed in our responsibility to educate all youth. We take the philosophy that we have individuals, and we take this individual and work to his fullest potential. And, yet, here I have ten percent or less of my students who are not making it, and I feel that I'm a failure, and my teachers are a failure. And it's out of desperation that we do this, yes.

MERROW: Do you think the American people understand what one disruptive kid can do to a classroom?

HALL: No, I don't.

MERROW: Try and describe it.

HALL: In a class of thirty, if you have one student who's constantly talking, throwing paper wads, cursing, pinching the girls, it's totally amazing how much attention that one student will take from the teacher. It's amazing the number of students he that he can draw into his crowd, and they start acting as he does. They may not be as bad, but they start following a few things. They may start talking excessively. They may not pay attention, and it's tremendous -- you just have to teach to understand it.

MERROW: Thanks very much. Bill Hall, who is principal of a junior high school in New Smyrna Beach, Florida.

GOLDMAN: For that principal, and for many other school administrators, the solution to disruption, which often accompanies desegregation, is alternative schools, or social agencies.

MERROW: It's easy to understand why some school principals are looking for solutions outside the school. Schools depend on order and routine to function. They are, by and large, middle-class institutions. But, as Dr. Harold Hodgkinson pointed out earlier, the population of public schools is changing.

GOLDMAN: One speaker at the Denver conference said that "schools and teachers can make a great difference, that integration is essential and possible." He's Dr. Samuel Proctor, a Martin Luther King Professor at Rutgers University and Minister of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City.

DR. SAMUEL PROCTOR

PROCTOR: I'm reminded of the preacher whose offerings had fallen off, and the offices had gone to drinking, and a little bit of hanky-panky going on in the choir, and he called his own church meeting. He said, "This is not a business meeting -- this is my meeting." And they all got together that night, and everybody was quiet, and he got up, and they could tell he was very angry. He said, "I ain't preaching tonight -- I'm telling the truth."

GOLDMAN: Dr. Proctor believes minority students are often caught in a downward spiral of futility.

PROCTOR: The spiral begins with an awareness of rejection. I live in an integrated neighborhood in New Jersey. We've had a good time living there. One summer I decided to put my son in a day camp. Up to that point, I had successfully spared him from all sorts of racial epithets and all kinds of insults -- we cushioned him against it.

At about age eight, riding on the bus one day -- all white boys on the bus one day -- all white boys and my son. He came home crying because a little boy told him he couldn't sit with him anymore, because the older children on the bus said that if he sat with the "darky," then he couldn't play with them anymore. And sure enough, a twelve-year-old boy thought it was time to announce to my son that he was different. Clean, bright, athletic, musical, but Black! The

spiral starts with an awareness of rejection. Follow me now -- rejection, then isolation. And in this isolation there develops all of the whole range of defense mechanisms. But when they reach out, they amount to hostility -- mean, cussin' and ready to fight -- takin' no stuff off nobody -- hostility.

After that, comes the withdrawal from all of the success symbols that other people recognize, and acceptance of a failing position in this society. At about this point, one is ready for the drug business -- one is ready for violent crime -- one is ready for anything -- one has accepted failure for himself.

And after this, comes the lapsing into futility -- extorting money, throwing away textbooks, fighting teachers, and without any of these, just looking at the whole school exercise as somewhere to be warm in winter and have fun in the spring time.

Name me a school in a big city or a small town that does not recognize the spiral as it moves towards futility. When this is reversed, it's beautiful. Everyone of us can recognize it when it is moving in reverse. First, is an awareness of acceptance. I remember going to a program funded by OEO sometime ago. They had given some money to Skidmore College to have a program for teaching English to tough, little kids from the slums of the Bronx, and it was a young Jewish fellow who was supposed to be the best who ever did it in the Bronx. He taught these kids literature and English by having them write songs. He was a musician himself and an English teacher, and he just backed into the whole thing through music. "Kids love music," he said. "If you start with music, with these kids, you can go to anything." I said, "Let me see a little piece of this action -- I've got to report something down here on what you're doing with this money." He said, "Okay, watch us today -- we're going to do a blues song." All these tough little kids are going to do a blues song! Had everybody write blues lyrics. "What's the blues?" "Marie, what's the blues?" "Blues is where you let it all hang out," she said. Another one said, "The blues is when you hurt so bad you don't mind having everybody know it." Another one said, "The blues is therapeutic." Supposed to be slum kids -- they were distinguishing blues from everything else. "Okay, go write some blues -- don't lie," he said. "Write something you know something about." So, they all came back with their verses.

One kid came back with the verse that won the prize. And she stood there and sang it for a little while. And she said -- get the brushes going on the drum and get the rhythm right -- and she said, "Papa ain't no good, and mama shouldn't a married him nohow -- papa ain't no good, and mama shouldn't a married him nohow." Then she gave the verses, and when you heard the verses, you would have agreed with her, that papa was a nogood. And so, finally, he said, "Let's translate this into standard English -- who wants to try it first?" "Papa ain't no good - mama shouldn't a married him nohow -- what have we got here -- double negatives?" So, she said, "Well, I have it already." He said, "Okay, how would you write that if you were writing it for an examination for Con Edison or United Food Company?" She said, "I would write it -- father is a very undesirable personality, and mother should not have married him under any circumstances."

And on the lesson went, and this fellow was just as cool and together. But he had made up his mind about a little theory he was going to use -- nothing sacrosanct about how you teach kids. He found his access to them through music, and through that idiom, he was moving toward the teaching of standard English.

Consider another friend of mine who said to me in one of my classes: "Dr. Proctor, you just want everybody to be middle class." He said, "Why don't you let these Black people be what they want to be?" I said, "because I love them, and I know they are going to suffer if they don't learn how to master some of these skills." I said, "What do you do?" He said, "Oh, I just let them talk the way they want to talk -- genuine and honest communication." Here's a guy with a Ph.D. degree, now, making $21,000 a year, and he wants to see somebody else stay poor forever. He said, "I had a kid the other day to come to me and say I 'bees' sick." I said, "What did you think he meant?" "He meant that all Black folk are sick all the time." I said, "you're either a liar, or a fool -- you know full well that's not what he meant when he said I 'bees' sick. He meant that he did not know the finite forms of the verb 'to be,' and you do know them. And you left him in his ignorance and in his limitation. Now, you're not supposed to insult him or frighten him if he says I 'bees' sick, but you want to show him the importance of it -- what a wonderful opportunity. You could have asked him -- 'what do you mean -- had you been sick nine days before Christmas? Were you sick all last week? Were you sick yesterday? Are you sick now?' You could have carried him through the whole thing to show him that I 'bees' sick may be the idiom used on his block, but he needs more than that to be understood in this world."

That's acceptance. That's being honest with children and helping them to reach their fulfillment. When one knows that he's accepted, then he's eager to participate. See, I went to all-Black schools all of my life, no white teachers, no white coach, no white band director. The only white man to touch my life before I was 18 was a second-hand car dealer, who wanted to see my daddy a used car. In our little community in Norfolk, it was fitted out with everything -- morticians, everything we needed, we had it in Black -- the doctor who delivered me, the dentist who fixed my teeth -- everything was Black.

Now, behind that wall of segregation you lost a lot. And when you came out of it, it hurt. But one thing we did have behind that wall was warmth and acceptance. That's what we wore within -- participation, acceptance, and then, the posture of openness, ready to do anything - sing, play ball, blow a trombone, ready to run for student council, ready to apply for jobs where they didn't want Black folks, ready to try new things, ready for a sit-in movement, ready for anything - when you're secure on the inside.

What does one have to do in order to cause this to change? Well, I think high school personnel need to be aware of the roots of this problem, need to know something about cultural difference. We need a kind of a visceral knowledge of the pluralism and what lies beneath it. I don't think it's smart for a white man with a lot of responsibility, or a white woman for that matter, to brag and say, 'I don't know much about Black folk.' I think that's a cop-out. I think it's dishonorable. If you don't know much about them, you ought to get a book and read something about them and learn it fast. You may think it exonerates you and leaves you innocent and your hands clean when you say, 'as far as I'm concerned, I really don't know much about Black folks.' I may smile in your face, but what I'm thinking inside is that, if I had to learn about the Romans and the Carthaginians and the Mycenaeans and the Eskimos and the Indians, you could learn about Black folk.

The absolute ignorance of people regarding social class and what it does to people -- ignorance regarding the economy and how it operates -- how can we be so coldhearted if we knew these basic facts? Who is supposed to be teaching us sociology? Where are all

these liberal arts backgrounds? I go to institute after institute with teachers, people that teach education, and what I run into saddens me when I find so little sensitivity toward people who are poor, and who have been poor all of their lives. So many people who are fortunate and middle class act as though everyone in this room had exactly what he deserved, and the least acquaintance with economics and sociology would let us know that not everyone in this world has what he deserves. You could be the intervention in the lives of Black and minority children by the way you run your high school, by the way you run your district, by what you do to a racist teacher when you find out you've got one, by what you do in your faculty preparation seminars, by what you talk about in your faculty meetings, by the way you handle discipline cases -- you could be a major intervention for somebody who's already felt rejection and who has started the spiral moving toward futility.

The next thing that has to happen is this: we've got to create a new standard for teaching. What we know how to do now is how to sort pupils out, how to test them. Everybody knows how to write to Iowa and Princeton and buy a test, you know. We want to find out who the dummies are right now, so we don't have to be bothered with them. We all know how to do tracking and labeling, and we all know how to do accounting. We know all the kinds of things to do to reflect poorly on those who have not learned. We know everything to do, except how to inspire good teaching. We don't know how to teach human physiology so that students would be afraid of drugs going through the nervous system. We don't know how to teach the whole evolutionary spiral so that people can understand where racist came from, and what happens to those people born nearest the Equator, and why people who live near the North Pole have lighter hair and lighter eyes. We've done such a poor job of teaching all of these things that prejudice just thrives among us like a lot of weeds and something slimy in the culture. We've taught so poorly.

We know how to test. We know how to score. We know how to penalize. We know how to track. We know how to have homogeneous groupings. We know how to do everything, except take a young teacher and turn him on, so he can set somebody's mind on fire. I think we need a new standard for this. And there is one word that has to be learned somewhere in here, and that word is "vicariousness." You aren't really going to do much teaching unless you learn how to put yourself in another person's place.

As a college president, it always struck me that some people belonged in teaching, and some people just didn't. Students would talk with me about certain teachers, and I would always wonder what is the difference between this, these, and those. And I found the key word. The word is "vicariousness." Some teachers were sufficiently secure within themselves that they could go and risk getting involved empathetically in the life of a child. We've got to start with something very mundane, something very pedestrian, finding the right kind of person who can be vicarious. We have a chance. I believe we have a chance. Right where we are -- in highschool classrooms and in principals' offices, we have a chance. In county school board offices, we have a chance. In a college seminar on teacher education, I have a chance. Each one of us has a chance on any given day to commit that one existential act, that would bind us to a brighter future for our young people, and to a brighter future for our nation. Thank you.

MERROW: Dr. Samuel Proctor of Rutgers University.

(MUSIC -- "For the City")

MERROW: Dr. Samuel Proctor says we can break the spiral of futility with teachers who understand poverty and who care, but most teachers do care. Crowded classrooms, fear, and financial limitation often keep them from acting in the best interest of every student. Person-to-person contact is certainly important, but it can't overcome the social class differences that exist in this country; at least that's the opinion of Robert Coles, Pulitzer prize winner, author and teacher. He spoke at the annual meeting of the Education Writer's Association in Boston.

ROBERT COLES

COLES: There is a kind of upper middle class snottiness and crudity that I don't think has been done justice to by those who study the sociology and psychology of prejudice. Class, in this country, protects people, not only from school desegregation and busing, but I would argue from social science analysis, and maybe from good reporting. The racism in South Boston is obvious - and it is racism. It's not only class and neighborhood, but it is racism.

A reporter here from the Atlanta Journal asked me before he left, "How is it that the Chamber of Commerce in Boston could not take the kind of leadership that the Chamber of Commerce in Atlanta took in this kind of crisis?" And that's a very good question -- what it comes to is the difference between the Chamber of Commerce in Atlanta, which is made up of people who have worked their way up out of an entire community, and have become respected members of that community, as opposed to the Boston Chamber of Commerce, which has a long history of being an outside organization of well-to-do people whose roots are outside of the city and whose background and educational and national ancestry, and whatever, are at variance with the working people of this city. That is -- to spell it out, the poor Irish and Italian and Jewish people who came to this city in the middle and latter part of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, and who came into a city that was run by upper middle-class Yankee people whose bigotry toward the Irish or the Italians or the Jews the south knows nothing about. I'm not saying the south isn't capable of this, but it knows nothing about it, because the south does not have this kind of intense and, at times, vicious and violent white-against-white history.

The south has always been able to absorb those Jewish peddlers and the Irish channel in New Orleans and some Italians that have moved there. Even a couple of thousand Chinese have been absorbed in Mississippi. Anything, so long as there is the Black issue that has always protected all kinds of white and oriental people--but in the north, apart from the vicious treatment of Blacks in the 19th century in this city, there has been a history of religious antagonism and ethnic antagonism. And I can tell you this city has been so violent -- this city was the most anti-semetic city in America, and it wasn't just prejudice. It was violence -- synagogues being defaced -- Jews assaulted by mobs. Is it racism, people say. Is it class? It's both.

The fact is that the people of South Boston do, indeed, have neighborhood royalties and do, indeed, have memories of condescension and, at times, brutal exploitation at the hands of an arrogant elite. Read about the police strike in Boston in 1919, and you'll see how populism in this city was squelched and by whom - by a clever, ambitious man named Calvin Coolidge, a sleezy operator if there ever was one, who went on to become President on the class warfare he encouraged and took advantage of in this city.

I think this country has a class system, and it has been one of the unmentionables in American life. I think that this school desegregation struggle is both a racial one, but ultimately, comes up against the issue of class. And until the class nature of this struggle is given at least equal analysis, co-equal with the racial aspects of it, then I think we are missing important points. I think that the only way this country is going to get around these issues is through some populist pressure, some populist power that becomes realized in the political process, which I don't see imminently around the corner.

MERROW: Robert Coles, Harvard teacher and writer, for whom school desegregation and social integration are primarily economic class issues. Coles tell us that racism obscures another problem -- the rich versus the poor.

GOLDMAN: But what about the kids? What do they say? Cathy Lewis of member station WBFO asked Coleen Hanrahan, a white eighth grader in Buffalo, New York, about her experience in an integrated school.

COLEEN HANKAHAN & ERIC WATT

HANRAHAN: You figure when Blacks are coming in, all the white kids are going -- oh, I don't want them to come into this school -- oh, they're coming into our school -- we don't want them in here -- why don't they stay where they belong? And that's the way everybody acted the first year when they started coming in. And nobody liked it until the second year, and the eighth graders now, they don't mind it -- we're all friends now. Now, the Blacks are coming in the seventh grades, and they're not understood, and it's going to take them a whole year to understand what's going on.

MERROW: How children analyze desegregation and its attended problems may strike you as profoundly simple, or just simple. But we ought to listen. Eric Watt, a high school student in Buffalo is president of The Pupil Integration Advisory Committee. He joins Coleen Hanrahan in a discussion of education.

WATT: My children would have a chance to learn something that the parents didn't learn. So, I figure if they've got to go to school, that's what they should get out of it -- a good learning.

HANRAHAN: I just think the kids should go to school and learn what they have to learn and just go. If they don't want to go to college, they should just finish high school and learn what they have to learn for when they go to work, or whatever they have to do.

WATT: I've got a feeling that integration can work if the parents would just stand back and see how the children will like it. If the parents are going to get in the way, it's just going to get more messy. And all the riots and everything are caused by most of the parents. If they just stand back, I believe it can work better than if the parents would be up in front and order everybody around.

MERROW: Coleen Hanrahan and Eric Watt, high school students in Buffalo, New York, talking with reporter Cathy Lewis of member station WBFO.

So, where you stand on integration depends on where you sit. Students find fault with parents. Parents find fault with teachers and administrators, and then, everybody finds fault with disruptive

minority students. But a lot of thoughtful people are saying that our school and social policies ought to pay more attention to the factor of social class. Perhaps the white and Black parents who are fleeing the cities and the public schools are avoiding social class integration, not racial mixing. If that is the case, then our public schools may become the dumping ground for the poor. As a nation, we may still be letting racism obscure other social issues, something that seems to be a sure-fire recipe for social dynamite. This is John Merrow.

(MUSIC -- "Nothing But the Dead of Night")

GOLDMAN: If you would like a transcript of this program, send 25 cents to National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D.C. 20036. Ask for Program No. 32. A cassette is available for $4.

MERROW: Before we give the address again, we'd like to ask you to help us improve OPTIONS IN EDUCATION. A grant from the Carnegie Corporation in New York allowed us to design a questionnaire which we send to everyone who writes us about our programs. If you'd like to give us your views about education and this series, drop us a post card or a letter, and we'll send you the questionnaire, a stamped envelope, and a free transcript of this program. All responses are confidential.

GOLDMAN: That address again: National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D.C. 20036. Material for this program came from Cathy Lewis of member station WBFO in Buffalo, New York. I'm Connie Goldman.

(MUSIC)

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